

New school to rise on Oxnard campus

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Outside the Harrington School classrooms in Oxnard, there will soon be a whole lot of banging going on.

Workers are building a brand-new school on the campus grounds while the existing facilities continue to accommodate teachers and students. When the new school opens in January 2016, the old school will be demolished.

"This community has not had a new school since the 1950s," Principal Amelia Sugden said. "A lot has changed in terms of how our facilities house educational programs."

District leaders will host a groundbreaking Thursday at the school to mark the start of the \$22 million project. The new school is funded by Measure R, a bond initiative approved in 2012.

The school on Gisler Avenue was built in 1955 and was designed to have 18 classrooms. As the student body grew over the years, the Oxnard School District added portable buildings. There are now 27 classrooms, with nine in portable structures that are two decades old.

"They're not ideal," Sugden said about the portable structures. "They're fine as a temporary fix."

But the growing student population in Oxnard is hardly temporary.

There were nearly 17,000 students in the district last year, an increase of 1,250 from four years ago. More than 300 new students entered the district this school year, and another 300 are expected each year until enrollment reaches 20,000.

Harrington is one of three schools in the 20-school district to get a new campus.

A similar reconstruction will take place at Lemonwood and Elm schools. Depending on architectural approval by the state, construction could begin next summer for Elm and next fall for Lemonwood.

At Elm and Lemonwood, the majority of classrooms are in portable structures, said Jorge Gutierrez, director of facilities for the district. Elm has 12 permanent and 19 portable classrooms, while Lemonwood has 15 permanent and 24 portable classrooms.

When the new Harrington campus is complete, there will be a two-story building with 23 classrooms and a multipurpose room. A single-story building will house four

kindergarten classrooms and the main office. There also will be a special education classroom, a piano lab, a room for hands-on projects and a media center where students may bring iPads and work in groups.

Gutierrez said key features of the new school will be the expanded support facilities.

“When they built the school in the 1950s, they built it with the support facilities appropriate at the time,” Gutierrez said. “When you add portables, you don’t expand the cafeteria, administration building or restrooms.”

The groundbreaking at 11 a.m. Thursday will be open to the community.